

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) released the following statement in regards to a letter sent today by House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie Thompson to U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff concerning recent reports of a Maryland police surveillance program that covertly monitored Maryland peace and activist groups:

"The state surveillance program conducted under the Ehrlich Administration that secretly monitored law-abiding citizens exercising their constitutional rights raises serious concerns that merit further investigation. While it is the job of law enforcement to protect the public and keep the peace, it is difficult to understand how non-violent peace activists and opponents of the death penalty constituted a threat to public safety. We need to understand why the monitoring of these and other citizens took place - and whether any federal funds were used in support of this program.

"Given the press accounts of these activities, I believe Chairman Thompson's request is a reasonable and timely effort to determine the scope and nature of the program. I urge Secretary Chertoff to look into this serious inquiry and respond fully."

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